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ADDRESS

BY

THE HONOURABLE ARTHUR LAING, P.C., M.P.,

MINISTER OF

INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

TO THE

B.C. WILDLIFE FEDERATION ANNUAL CONVENTION

EMPRESS HOTEL,

VICTORIA, B. C.

FRIDAY, MAY 5, 1967.


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If enough Whooping Cranes fly north this year, the Canadian government will gather some eggs and fly them to an American government hatchery in an effort to build a breeding flock of the rare birds. The Honourable Arthur Laing, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development told a Victoria audience today that the Canadian Wildlife Service has been waiting for a wet year, when the survival rate of naturally hatched birds is poor to make the try. "It now seems that this is the wet year," he said.

Mr. Laing, speaking to the B.C. Wildlife Federation also said that the time had come for the federal government to look at the need for outdoor recreation areas as well as the field of conservation now embodied in the National Parks.

After pointing out that the National Parks are essentially for the preservation of wilderness areas, the Minister said that he believed there was a case for meeting other recreational needs at the national level as a "way of signalling their importance in the national life". He went on to say that he had in mind coastline areas, certain waterways and recreational parks.

The Minister said that there are now only about fifty Whooping Cranes left alive. He said that in 1964 the Department made an agreement with the United States Department of the Interior to build up a captive flock for breeding purposes. "It has been discovered," he said, "that in very wet years very few of the immature birds survived". As this is expected to be such a year, the Wildlife Service plans to collect up to six eggs from the nests and will

fly them, packed in portable incubators and accompanied by a biologist-
aviculturist to a specially prepared propagation station in the States.

It is hoped that this breeding flock can be built up to ten captive pairs
which will produce at least one hundred whoopers a year for release to the
wilds. A wild pair doesn't hatch more than two eggs and of all those
that hatch only five reach the wintering ground in Texas.

Mr. Laing told the group that there is a growing threat to wildlife from
such causes as the recent shipwreck of the tanker Torrey Castle ^{Canyon} which
spilled oil on the south coast of Britain and killed thousands of sea
birds. He said that the hazards grow at the same time as man's needs expand.
Calling the next thirty-three years those of greatest peril, the Minister
called for all Canadians to get into the conservationist cause.

Among my most pleasant duties is that of meeting groups such as this to discuss the wildlife situation. I find immense satisfaction in the field of conservation, whether it be the conservation of history, as in the Historic Sites of Canada's wilderness, as in the National Parks and, of course, of the living creatures which make up our wildlife.

Conservation was the neglected child of Canadian life in the years before and just after confederation. I suppose it seemed to Canadians of those years that we could not ever run out of untilled, top grade farm land, that we could never see our buffalo herds eliminated, that such species as the Passenger Pigeon would forever darken the skies.

An old friend of mine told me recently that he lived at Cloverdale when he was a boy. This would be around 1910. He said that he used to come home from school and his mother would tell him that she wanted some pheasants or ducks for dinner that night. He used to get on his pony and ride over to the flats and always shot however many birds were needed. To him, at that time, it was not possible that things would ever be different.

I am told that some Edmonton business men hunt ducks between leaving work and going home for dinner, and that they always bring some home. This happy way of life cannot be expected to last unless we take care of our inheritance.

This is Canada's Centennial Year. It is also the year which marks our progress through the first two thirds of the 20th century. What can we expect of the next century of Confederation, what can we look for in the 21st century?

All across the continent there is a great expansion of industrial life. The suburban growth around our cities sprawls over the countryside. Even in the vast central plains, conflicts over the use of existing land resource grow with the passage of the years.

Man in his industrial civilization has mastered the mechanics of production to a degree undreamed of in years gone by. Where does he stand with Nature? What of the needs of the soul of man who has for untold thousands of years been a natural hunter, a natural outdoorsman?

Machinery creates goods with less input of physical effort, it creates the needs of our mechanistic society with fewer people in fewer hours. I have no doubt that man's innate common sense will master the problems of distribution. I am not one of those who think machines put people out of work. I believe that they can create for man a kind of existence which will restore his dignity and remove the grinding, blind toil which has disfigured our life from time immemorial.

However when man, the hunter, found himself with time on his hands, he stood in a world of nature, a world in which he was at home with the creatures and with the woods and streams around him.

Today man may not know how to use his leisure in constructive ways. Too many, finding themselves with time and money on their hands, decide they will hunt or fish and off they go with no idea of what they are getting into.

In the years to come there will be more people, they will live longer and will have more leisure. They will be more mobile. Those few corners of our country where man is seldom seen will be fewer and very hard to reach.

Those of us who believe that man must have more than material things, that man has deep natural needs which only the outdoors, only the life of the woods and fields can fill, must look to this future. We must accept this challenge and we must prepare, not only ourselves but the world around us. For if we do not care about the future of those things we hold dear, who will?

The next 33 years are the crucial ones for North American conservation. We simply must lay the foundations for the future generations in this period. There must be sufficient parkland, sufficient wildlife habitat, sufficient wilderness set aside so that all succeeding generations of Canadians can feel that we have not failed them. We must have more National Parkland and some of it should be close to the densely populated area. My officials tell me that we must add 40 to 60 new parks between now and 1985 if we are to provide for our needs. To fail in this would throw a burden onto future generations. A burden of insufficient parkland for their essential needs, or a burden of spending millions of dollars to recapture land for park purposes.

Our needs go beyond natural wilderness parks. They extend to every kind of outdoor recreational facility. Now of course, the National Parks are not the only system of parks. The provincial and city parks fill a need. There is room for many different kinds of park and for many different kinds of park system in Canada.

At the moment National Parks provide for the preservation of elements of importance in the Canadian physical environment. They are not, for the most part, intended to meet all the various recreational needs of the public, not by any means.

There may be a case and I believe there is, for meeting other needs at the national level as a way of signalling their importance in our national life. I have in mind that we must take care of our needs to preserve our coastline areas, certain waterways and we may even have need for some National Recreational parks.

The demand for money and trained staff created by the present National Parks system are such that we have our hands full at this time. But I recognize that a broader perspective of our conservation needs is required. We must keep faith with the generations who will occupy our land after us. If we are to keep this faith then we must soon set aside areas such as these for there may not be many years left when they are available.

On this question of preserving the essential elements of our countryside, I am happy to say that progress is being made in the matter of conserving wildlife habitat. The Canadian Wildlife Service has been increasingly

concerned with the diminution of nesting and breeding places for waterfowl. To meet the immediate needs, the Wildlife Service has entered into pilot agreements with landowners under which they agree not to fill the wetlands and not to drain potholes for a period of twenty years. These agreements provide the landowner with a rental which relates to the productive value of the surrounding land. This pilot program will become operational in 1967.

We expect the program to cost about \$9 million in its peak year, based on our present estimates of the land area we will require. This will preserve about four fifths of the wetland acreage on the prairies for the waterfowl.

This program has been criticized as being short term. The critics have suggested that our twenty year agreements aren't long enough and that we ought to be buying land at the lowest possible cost right now.

We believe there are advantages in the easements we are seeking. For one thing, if we bought the land outright, we would be faced with an enormous problem of administering it. The resources which would be tied up in this can be better employed in other ways.

We feel, too that the farmer who sees the wildlife as tenants who pay rent, will regard the sportsmen as his friends.

In respect to the amount we pay, I believe it is best for everyone if everyone involved gets a fair deal. If we pay the farmer a reasonable, economic rent, it will make it easier for us to discuss the problem of

public access to private lands. There will be a spirit of co-operation between the two groups which is essential for both.

Some American sportsmen have suggested that their government has a part to play in this program. Ducks don't recognize the International Boundary. Well, the Canadian government has decided to accept its full responsibility for this program. Whether the U.S. government would, in fact provide funds or not, I do not know. We prefer to recognize our responsibility in this area rather than depend upon our good neighbours. In this way Canadian needs and requirements can be taken into account without apology. I think it is better for all Canadians if we pay our own way wherever we can.

In the Kootenays we have agreed with the provincial authorities on a plan for management of the Crown lands involved in that particular wildlife habitat. One third of the unreclaimed wetland at Kootenay Flats is Indian land. This, of course is another of my trust responsibilities. I have no choice but to ensure that the Indian people get the most money they can from the use of this land. I wouldn't want it any other way. If wildlife preservation is to be kept up, we must all pay on the basis of the going price. We can't expect one group, the Indian people, to, in effect, pay by foregoing the best return.

If we find that the Indian Land up there is being used for its best purpose as wildlife habitat, the Indians must be given the same return, either in cash rental or in cash and employment that any other use will bring to them.

I wear two hats in this arrangement. I am a trustee for the Indian people's estate in the land and I am trustee for the conservation of wildlife. I can promise that those trusts will both be discharged properly as long as they are my responsibility.

The Canadian Wildlife Service will be working closely with the Indian people and with the Provincial authorities to ensure that all the various interests are properly protected.

Later this afternoon, I understand you will be discussing the Canadian Land Inventory. When this has been completed it will provide valuable data as to the resources available for the future.

After that we can start looking at the competitive uses to which the land might be put. All of us who are concerned about conservation, all of us who are concerned to see that our children and grandchildren have some opportunity to know Canada out of doors, will want to say something about prospective uses of land. We will want to make sure that there is enough set aside for those things which we care about. We will want to know our wildlife is not to be thrust aside in the name of progress.

There will be suggestions of multi-use for some of the land, and I have no doubt that some of it can be put to a multiplicity of uses. However I have noticed that the usual multiple use of land that is proposed to us, is a suggestion that we might add a commercial exploitation to an already established recreational use. There is considerably less enthusiasm for adding recreational uses to land already in commercial use.

The time is fast coming to an end when we can be profligate about land required for outdoor use, for wildlife purposes. Too many aspects are already threatened with extinction.

I spoke earlier of the disappearance of Passenger Pigeons and the consequent loss to our wildlife resource. Another species has been threatened over the years, the Whooping Crane. There are now about 50 of these birds alive. In 1964 we made an agreement with the United States Department of the Interior to build up a captive flock of them for breeding purposes.

It has been discovered that in very wet years very few of the immature birds survive. Our agreement provides that in these wet years, up to six eggs will be collected from the bird's nests and then they would be flown to a specially prepared propagation station in the United States.

It now seems that this is one of the wet years. If twenty five birds fly North, we will collect the eggs this year, they will be placed in portable incubators and, accompanied by a biologist-aviculturist they will be flown South.

If we can build up ten captive breeding pairs, we should be able to produce at least one hundred whoopers a year for release to the wild. A wild pair doesn't hatch more than two eggs a year and of those that hatch only five a year survive to get to the wintering area down in Texas.

So we try to increase our diminished flock of Whooping Cranes, we plan our programs to ensure that our ducks, geese and other migratory birds continue in sufficient numbers.

But the hazards grow. The recent wreck of a supertanker off the coast of Britain brings vividly before us the immensity of the dangers with which wildlife is faced. But the enormous loss of seabirds in the Torrey Castle incident is not an isolated case. In 1962 a pipeline burst along the Mississippi and dumped 3 million gallons of soybean oil into the river. The oil was trapped under the ice and when the ice melted and released it, 10,000 ducks and geese were killed. In 1960 oil jettisoned by tankers off Newfoundland killed 250,900 birds of many species. The very size of the tanks in these new superships means that any accident to such a vessel automatically creates an immense hazard to birdlife.

The hazards grow. Man's need for wildlife resources grows. His capability of matching needs to availability does not keep pace. As I said in the beginning, the next thirty-three years will see the end of the century of man's greatest progress and of the greatest peril to the world as it once was.

We must match our will to the task. We must each do what can be done to ensure that our children, and their children and on down through Canada's centuries are not deprived of the basic right and need of open spaces and Nature's occupants.

